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R 111754Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9218
INFO RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 7928
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3764
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 1425
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 0434
RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU 3795
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 1978
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 2624
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHDC

UNCLAS PORT OF SPAIN 000256

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR INL/LP, WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR KCRM TD

SUBJECT: TRINIDAD INL CANINE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO GROW

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) On June 6, the Chaguaramas K-9 Academy hosted its sixth graduation ceremony. Thirteen dogs and their handlers, representing the Customs and Excise and Prisons Division, demonstrated skills learned during the previous four months. The audience of law enforcement officials, family and media witnessed the dogs completing obedience, agility and tactical exercises. In addition to detecting marijuana and locating "escapees" hidden in the brush, two dogs subdued an uncooperative assailant with a firearm in several mock drills.

¶2. (SBU) Prisons Commissioner, John Rougier was enthusiastic about the potential of the division's seven dogs for crowd control, narcotics detection, interception of escapees and detection of illegal activities by both inmates and rogue officers. He stated that, "the intensive training given to both dogs and their handlers alike gives them the discipline needed to handle the work they have to do." This was the first time the Prisons Division sponsored canine units. Rougier indicated to PolOff that he intended to purchase an additional ten dogs.

¶3. (U) Comptroller for Customs and Excise Fitzroy John added that the K-9 Academy provided standardized training and a synergy between the law enforcement agencies, which is not typically customary in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). He stated that Customs continues to participate in the program because it is conducted according to international standards.

¶4. (SBU) Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force (TTDF) representatives also attended the ceremony. Anthony Piegano, K-9 Academy director, privately told PolOff that the TTDF had received approval for developing a TTDF tactical canine unit. Piegano also commented that, for the first time, the class included female officers. Furthermore, the female barracks was now completed, which would expand the handlers candidate pool.

¶5. (U) Since the inception of the K-9 Academy in 2005, 36 dogs and handlers have graduated. In addition to the Customs and Excise and Prisons Divisions, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services (TTPS) regularly support this program. Dogs from this academy are directly responsible for the seizure of over 1,000 kilos of illegal drugs and 500 arrests. While completing the most recent four-month training program, several dogs participated in an interdiction in Tobago, resulting in the seizure of three and a half kilos of cocaine. The K-9 Academy continues to stand out as an example of a successful INL-funded bilateral program. After INL provided initial support as well as four explosive detection dogs, the Government of

Trinidad and Tobago has maintained the program and has utilized it to promote interagency cooperation among various law enforcement agencies.

¶6. (SBU) Comment. The K-9 Academy has been a very positive INL-funded program and a model for inter-agency cooperation within the GOTT. Although the GOTT was initially skeptical due to poor performance and lack of results from the previous Caroni Dog Kennels, the Chaguaramas K-9 Academy, under the directorship of Piegano, has become a valued resource for various local law enforcement agencies. Indeed, one of the canines that "graduated" on June 6 was involved in a June 9 port seizure of 96 heroin packets and 20 cocaine packets hidden in a shipping container.

¶7. (SBU) Former Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) for Tobago Bastien and current Tobago ACP Fredericks (also the former Director of the Organized Crimes and Narcotics Bureau), have requested assistance in establishing a kennel on Tobago and expanding the K-9 Academy. LEWG members concur that interdictions would increase if there was a permanent canine presence on the sister isle. However, with Piegano's contract set to expire in October 2008, and negotiations stalled due to personality conflicts between Piegano and certain TTPS officials, Post is anxious to first see a contract extension that includes a transitional plan for directorship prior to recommending a Tobago K-9 site. END COMMENT.

Austin